

Oh, sow pretty

With just-picked' flowers now the blooms of choice, **Clare Nolan** visits an Oxfordshire smallholding that's putting the English country garden back in our bouquets



Organic flower farm and florist business Green and Gorgeous, a six-acre smallholding in Little Stoke, south Oxfordshire, is run by Jo Wise and Rachel Siegfried, who specialise in English garden favourites, such as sweet peas, stocks and roses.

THEIR MAIN FLORAL FOCUS?

“Fresh, fragrant flowers with that ‘just-picked’ look, arranged to give the impression they have been collected from a wild flower meadow.”

THEIR BEST BIT?

“We love our flowers and find them endlessly fascinating, forgiving and very therapeutic. Whenever we do the arrangements for a wedding or hand over a bouquet, we see just how much happiness they can bring.”

AVERAGE DAY?

“Up at 5.30am to check picking orders for the local farmers’ markets or weddings, followed by gardening – seed sowing, pricking out, potting and planting out. There is always weeding to be done. We only stop to serve people collecting bouquets. Finish at about 5pm outside and then go in to sort out admin, emails and the blog.”

TOP ‘VASE’ PERFORMERS?

“Bulbs, such as narcissus, tulips, anemones and ranunculus, which are all excellent in spring and can last for up to two weeks. Later in the season, Sweet Williams, alstroemeria, zinnias and chrysanthemums are all long lasting.”

BEST FLOWERS FOR FRAGRANCE?

“Roses, sweet peas, stocks, pinks, narcissus and heliotrope are all favourites. But don’t overlook the intense scents from foliage such as acidanthera, scented-leaved pelargoniums, and herbs such as apple mint, dill and rosemary – these all add to the overall perfume of an arrangement and the experience of it.”

PRIME TIME TO PICK YOUR FLOWERS?

“Early morning or in the evening. They need to be at the right stage of development when you pick them, for instance, a peony bud should feel like a marshmallow when squeezed, while a rose should only just be beginning to unfurl.”

WORST BIT?

“The weather – last year’s cold winter reached minus 18°C at one point, and a long drought and intense heat in early spring definitely dampened our spirits.”



JO'S GUIDE TO LONG-LASTING BLOOMS

- Pick them at the right time of day – either early or late. Carry a bucket of water with you so that the cut stems can go straight into water.
- Once you've picked your flowers, sit the bucket somewhere cool and dark (a shed or garage is ideal) for 24 hours so that they can drink plenty of water before they are arranged.
- Hygiene is essential – buckets and vases should be bleached to stop bacteria growing.
- The position of the display also needs to be considered – keep it out of direct sunlight and away from electrical appliances and bananas (fruit gases will destroy cut flowers quicker)!



RACHEL'S TOP 10 FLOWERS FOR CUTTING

- Sweet peas** – for the scent, abundance of flowers and nostalgic charm.
- Apple mint** – our top foliage/filler – it has a wonderful fragrance.
- Dahlias** – they add vibrant colour just when the garden is looking tired. Once cut, they bloom again and have a great variety of forms and colours.
- Anemones** – perfect for early spring hues.
- Roses** – the scented garden varieties that flower from June to September are best.
- Ammi** – we love using frothy umbels such as the hardy annual ‘Bishop’s Flower’.
- Poppies** – the ‘Oriental’, ‘Iceland’ and corn poppies are ideal for that ‘meadow’ look. Soak the stems in boiling water for 30 seconds and they will last for five days in displays.

- Foxgloves** – they give that all-important ‘spire’ shape to add height to arrangements. The ‘Camelot’ series is a perennial variety flowering for months rather than weeks.
- Nicotiana** – great for scent and colour, this half-hardy annual is incredibly productive from mid-summer to autumn. We use ‘Lime Green’ as a foliage/filler flower.
- Cornflowers** – sow late August and plant out in September/October for earlier and bigger flowers.
- Panicum ‘Frosted Explosion’** – an annual grass which we use as foliage/filler. It’s a great naturalising element in an arrangement and easy to grow. ▶

“We love our flowers and find them endlessly fascinating and very therapeutic. Whenever we do the arrangements for a wedding or hand over a bouquet, we see just how much happiness they can bring”

CREATE YOUR OWN CUTTING GARDEN

If the idea of ‘live cutting’ flowers from your borders fills you with horror, why not set up a dedicated flower-cutting patch? Try dahlias and other annual plants such as cosmos, nicotiana, ageratum, cleome, cobaea, didiscus, amaranthus, tithonia, antirrhinums, zinnias, heliotrope and verbena, which tend to be more hardy.



OUR PICK OF THE BEST BRITISH FLOWER GROWERS

It makes sense to buy flowers locally, just as you would your fruit and vegetables. Most growers sell a 'pick of the garden' bouquet, made up of whatever is in season (usually from the end of March to October) and looking best. To find your nearest grower, search the Yellow Pages under flower grower; visit a 'pick your own' farm (www.pickyourown.info) or choose from one of the companies listed below (prices are for a bouquet including delivery).

Green and Gorgeous

The Cutting Garden, Little Stoke, Wallingford, Oxon. 01491 824128, www.greenandgorgeousflowers.co.uk

Bouquets from £40.

Blooming Green

Loddington Farm, Linton, Kent. 01622 745917, www.bloominggreenflowers.co.uk

Bouquets from £45.

Catkin Flowers

Doddington Hall, Doddington, Lincolnshire. 01400 272344, www.catkinflowers.co.uk

Bouquets from £33.50.

Felicity Morgan

Jubilee House, Kinnerley, Shropshire. 0845 226 0608, www.felicitymorgan.co.uk

Bouquets from £35, available all year.

The Real Cut Flower Garden

Walkers Cottage, Clifford, Hereford. 01497 831177, www.cutflowergarden.co.uk

Bouquets from £35.

Wiggly Wigglers

Lower Blakemere Farm, Blakemere, Herefordshire. 01981 500391, www.wigglywigglers.co.uk

Bouquets from £31.50, available all year.

The Homegrown Flower Company

The Old Forge, Butchers Cross, Five Ashes, East Sussex. 01825 830194, www.thehomegrownflowercompany.co.uk

Bouquets from £25. 



WORDS: YOU MAGAZINE/MAIL ON SUNDAY. PHOTOGRAPHY: BRENT DARBY